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ABSTRACT

This paper examines (1) attempts at educational reform in Venezuela and Colombia by means of decentralization, and (2) the impact of decentralization on two contrasting educational systems. In Venezuela, the national school system was highly centralized with even routine decisions being made in Caracas, which resulted in a rigid, unresponsive relationship between local men and government officials. In Colombia, State and local units were relatively autonomous, and government funds were divided among these units so that control over allocations of educational money and enforcement of standard teacher qualification requirements were in the hands of the local units. In both countries, decentralization programs were designed that set up a series of regional offices to strike a better balance between local and national authorities. (RA)

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EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA: AN ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

by

Mark Hanson

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Foreword

Two words that are widely current in discussions of Latin American education are reform and decentralization; and the ills of overly centralized and unwieldy educational bureaucracies have been so pervasive and obvious that reform often begins with attempts at decentralization. The justification for the anguish and the activity is clear enough; in the face of rapid population growth, the schools are failing to deliver services that are adequate qualitatively or quantitatively. Substantial proportions of the school-age population are denied access to the system or provided an incomplete or ritualistic travesty of a basic education; and in some countries, despite heroic efforts at expansion, the absolute number of illiterates still continues to grow. Still, the past two decades have brought a vast expansion of numbers accommodated in some fashion; and in the coming decade the emphasis is shifting to ways and means of making this coverage a more meaningful educational experience for the majority of children. Hence, educators, and politicians too, are seeking ways to reform and improve the schools. In the more traditional national systems the need for flexibility and adaptability to change leads inevitably to an examination of the possibility of decentralization.

This paper examines attempts at decentralization in Venezuela and Colombia; at least the word "decentralization" was used in both attempts to reform the respective systems although the writer shows that it had a very different meaning when applied in the two countries.

In Venezuela the national school system was in fact highly centralized; local school authorities had little autonomy, and were "authorities" in name only; and even the most routine decisions were made in the Ministry

at Caracas and passed down to the schools. The results, predictably, were rigidity; lack of responsiveness, especially to pressures that were more than routine; and a considerable alienation or distance between local school men and Ministry officials. The situation was almost a classic illustration of the ailment de Madariaga attributed to the Spanish government in its vain attempts to govern the New World before Independence--the man on the distant scene understood but he carried out just enough of the directives to be comfortable.

The Colombian situation was quite different. Here the states had so much independence that the national government, empowered by law to establish policy and standards, was reduced to sending its money out and hoping for the best. State, municipal and private schools were the common pattern at both primary and secondary level in Colombia, with the majority of primary schools state run, and the majority of secondary schools under private auspices. The national government, which paid a substantial portion of teaching salaries, did not even have sufficient power to control the allocation of educational money so that it would be spent on education or to enforce standard qualifications for teachers.

Both countries and school systems were alike in one respect--schools were functioning poorly; wastage was high and the quality of service uniformly low.

In the Venezuelan decentralization the nation was divided into eight regions, and all ministries, including education, were directed to establish offices in the regions, to staff them, and to provide for regional planning, decision-making and control. Paradoxically, there was centralized decentralization, directed and pushed and controlled from

Caracas, as always. It is early to assess the effect of the Venezuelan decentralization attempt. The regional offices are established by law and the legislation and ordinances written, but much will depend on whether or not regional offices can be staffed by strong and competent people. At best, the decentralization has been taken only one step and it is not clear that there will be any increased authority or flexibility at the local district level. But the first move has been made, and instead of one lump of bureaucrats there will soon be eight.

Colombia with a different kind of problem adopted a different approach, but used the magic of the word "decentralization" to accomplish almost the opposite of what the word is generally taken to mean. In Colombia there were two major moves, and only the first might possibly merit the term decentralization, in that nine autonomous special purpose authorities were created to handle different levels and kinds of educational missions. The second component of the Colombian reform--the creation of regional educational funds I.E.F. (Fondos Educacionales Regionales)--actually lessened the authority of states in the control of schools. When the Colombian states signed the FER agreements they accepted the assignment of a delegado from the national government who had the power to approve and disapprove the allocation of funds for education. The nation now has a form of control that can be used to block misallocation of funds and enforce standards in teacher qualifications.

The paper also examines the possibilities of future reversals of the present policies and plans. One powerful influence that may block further progress is pressure for politically partisan patronage. In Venezuela the party in power makes good partisan use of teachers who have a strong position at the local level, and the power of selection of these teachers

may not be lightly surrendered in the future. In Colombia teaching has been a popular form of local patronage for the state governors, and this may bring attempts to circumvent the assignment of teachers through merit and training.

The comparison of the Colombian and Venezuelan experience is particularly useful to illustrate that the same word can be used to describe phenomena that are almost completely different. Both countries did what they had to do, given the situation that confronted them before the respective reforms. Venezuelan schools were too dependent on the national ministry; whereas in Colombia the opposite was the case for state schools. Comparative analysis has the virtue of making both activities clearer in terms of each other. In both cases, it is fair to say that though procedures differed according to the differing situation, the aim was to improve education and to deliver a better service to more children. So reform goes on in the Latin American schools, and it is worthwhile to have it confirmed that there is no "typical Latin American" country or school. Each country is different; each school system is different; and each works out its educational destiny in its own way.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA:
AN ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

This paper offers a general perspective on policy-making and policy-execution within the context of pre- and post-educational reform in Venezuela and Colombia. The first stage of the paper identifies pre-reform decisional problems related to organizational structure and administrative processes. The second stage examines the modifications of these decisional problems implicit in the reform movements. The final stage is a comparison of the Colombian and Venezuelan reform movements with respect to the pre-reform decisional problems and the post-reform systems modifications.[1]

Questions of organizational structure, policy, and administration are important at this time in Latin America because a number of countries have concluded that their traditional educational systems are not capable of meeting rapidly changing and increasing demands being placed upon them. Latin American educational systems can neither deliver adequate services to their populations nor insure that such services, when delivered, are appropriate in amount and kind to the requirements of the people. In short, nations forging the infrastructure of development are served poorly by educational systems designed historically to produce a social elite and serve agriculturally-based economies.

In an attempt to provide greater support to the process of socio-economic development, the Venezuelan and Colombian governments have incorporated a variety of goals into their educational reform movements,

among others: increased social and economic mobility of students, curricula more relevant to industrializing nations, reduced student dropout, upgraded teacher competence, and regionally differentiated education. A multi-front assault is, therefore, being waged on educational problems in each country.

Rather than focus on any of the stated goals of the reforms, this paper examines the organizational and administrative changes necessary to make the desired outcomes possible. Because the reforms are in an embryonic stage of development, the reforms as "plans and strategies" will be analyzed as they reflect changes from the pre-reform systems. The specific variables of analysis will be organizational structure and decision-making authority. Policy-making and policy-execution are understood to be forms of decision-making. Because Venezuela and Colombia are faced with very distinct organizational and administrative problems, a comparison of the two will be made to provide insight into the relationships between organizational structure and decision-making in large-scale systems.

The analysis is based on data obtained through observation, documentary analysis, and interviews conducted over a period of several months with educational officials at every level of the organizational hierarchies in both countries.

Conceptual Framework

The organizations analyzed in this paper are the educational systems of Colombia and Venezuela. Stinchcombe defines an organization as "a stable set of social relations deliberately created with the explicit intention of continually accomplishing some specific purpose."[2] An organization, then, is no more than a social mechanism designed to bring human and material resources to bear on an ongoing problem. Because the social mechanism consists of goal-oriented, interacting human beings, it is conceived of as a social system.[3]

Within the framework of a social system, human behavior must be so ordered that the actions of each member systematically contribute to a sequence of activity designed to accomplish a goal. The basic organizational unit which systematizes the ordering of human behavior is the role.

The role is elaborated here in terms of, among other things, task-responsibility and decision-making authority. A hierarchy is established in the system when roles receive varying degrees of task-responsibility and decision-making authority. The relationship between roles is referred to as organizational structure. An organizational structure, therefore, is a hierarchical network of roles ordered in such a way as to systematize human behavior toward achieving a goal.

Systematized human behavior, in its dynamic form, is conceptualized as a process. A chief function of organizational structure is the ordering of a series of processes essential for goal achievement. Most organizational theorists agree that the decision-making process is the center around which

almost all other organizational variables are organized.[4]

There are, of course, various types of decisions, and each type is usually made at a specified level in the hierarchy. Policy and procedural decisions, for example, are usually made at the top of the hierarchy. These decisions establish objectives and select the procedures for achieving the objectives. Executive decisions are usually made at middle levels and routine administrative decisions at lower levels of the hierarchy.[5]

Social systems theory emphasizes that organizations are made up of systems which are subdivided into subsystems. The dependence of the relationship between subsystems and systems varies, of course, with each case. Students, for example, are more dependent on teachers than on janitors for learning experiences. Thus, there are degrees of independence between social systems. Gouldner states, "Systems in which parts have a 'high' functional autonomy may be regarded as having a 'low' degree of system interdependence; conversely, systems in which parts have 'low' functional autonomy have a 'high' degree of system interdependence."[6]

Pre-reform Organization of Education in Venezuela

The national Constitution contains provisions which fix the pattern of educational organization in Venezuela. In terms of structure, the nation must permit the existence of three educational systems: 1) national, 2) state, and 3) municipal. Private schools are permitted. The 1,877,212 students registered in primary and secondary schools in the 1968-69 academic year were enrolled in the following systems:[7]

Table 1

Venezuelan Student Enrollment

	Primary	Secondary
national schools	53.83 percent	69.35 percent
state schools	24.60 percent	1.56 percent
municipal schools	7.20 percent	2.14 percent
private schools	13.97 percent	26.23 percent
autonomous schools	.38 percent	---
military schools	---	.69 percent
	99.98 percent	99.97 percent

Because of the uneven distribution of students in the systems, education in Venezuela tends to be national education. A reform that is to have a far reaching impact, therefore, must come through the national school system. The Ministry of Education is directly responsible for the national school system.

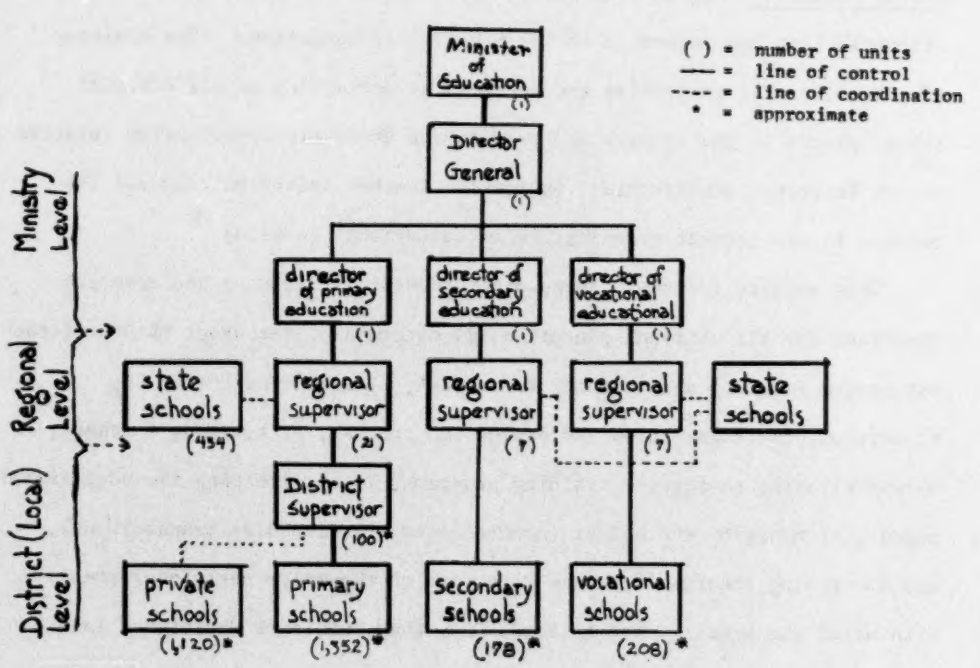
Prior to the reform, the Ministry established the academic program to which all educational systems were required to adhere, although each system made its own administrative decisions, i.e., hiring, promotion, budget construction, etc. These administrative decisions, however, were made within a policy framework established by the Ministry. (From this point forward, only the national school system will be discussed.)

Organizational Hierarchy and Authority Structure

In terms of organizational structure, the Ministry of Education is the parent system (ultimate responsibility and authority) which has distributed dependent subsystems throughout the country as a means of carrying out educational policy. As illustrated by Figure 1, the primary school system was divided into twenty-one regional zones, each of which maintained a regional supervisor as the chief educational officer. The regional zones were subdivided into districts, each of which maintained a district supervisor. There were over 100 districts in Venezuela. The educational officers immediately under the district supervisor were the local school directors.[8]

The secondary school branches (academic and vocational) maintained seven regional zones which were not subdivided into districts. Each local school director was responsible to a regional supervisor. A direct, unbroken chain of command, therefore, existed from the Minister of Education to the local school director.[9] An important question at this point becomes: where in the chain of command were the various types of pedagogical and administrative decisions made, and what were the consequences for the local school unit?

Figure 1
Venezuela -- Pre-Reform
Lines of Administrative Control



Decisional Points

The Constitution assigns the President of Venezuela the task of creating and maintaining the system of national education.[10] Through the Ley de Educación (Educational Law), the President delegated the following responsibility and authority to the Ministry of Education: "The Ministry of Education will centralize the pedagogical activities of all official school plants in the country and provide the necessary coordination relative to the location, construction, equipment, teacher selection, and all that relates to the current organization of educational services. . . ."

This mandate includes, among other things, 1) planning and research functions for all national education, 2) determining the exact nature of the curriculum (content and teaching technique), 3) selecting textbooks, 4) defining the examination and evaluation process, 5) training teachers, 6) establishing in-service training programs, 7) constructing the educational budget, 8) managing the budget (control over all financial transactions), and 9) storing records.[11] These were some of the major decisional areas with which the Ministry had to deal. How then, was this decisional load distributed throughout the hierarchy?

After studying the Educational Law, reading the documents that flowed up and down the organizational hierarchy, and interviewing supervisors from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy, the writer found it was impossible to identify any decisions made below the Ministry level which had any significant impact on the content or direction of administrative or pedagogical processes. The Center for Administrative and Social Research of the Venezuelan School of Public Administration reached a similar conclusion. The Center reports:

> With respect to the teaching process, the organizational hierarchy leaves no room for anyone (at lower levels) to select alternatives of action designed to reach a specific goal, nor can they establish any goals. The directives come from the Ministry of Education to the Regional Supervisor and from him to the District and Rural Supervisors who in turn transmit them to the School Directors and teachers. The lines of authority are completely defined; all the plans, programs, evaluation methods, etc., are elaborated at the top of the organization and transmitted from one level to another until all members of the school community adopt the same conduct.
>
> With respect to administrative aspects, there are these few decisions made by the Supervisors: the transfer of teachers within the same school region, and the selection of teachers to attend in-service training programs. . . .[12]

The task of the supervisors, in other words, is "to provide and transmit according to the rules established by the Ministry of Education."[13] Before the reform, therefore, the Ministry made the policy, procedural, executive and, in many cases, routine administrative decisions for the entire national school system.

Consequences Related to Decisional Points

Concentrating decision-making authority at the top of the hierarchy had a variety of consequences for the local school unit, but the three most notable were decisional time lag, system rigidity, and psychological distance. Decisional time lag is the amount of time usually required for the Ministry of Education to respond to a decisional request initiated by a local school. Various types of decisional requests submitted by local school directors were monitored. Examples of such requests were calls for additional teachers for unexpectedly high enrollments, replacements for worn out or damaged equipment, and repairs for damaged school buildings.

The school directors usually waited from six to twelve months for decisions to be made on their requests.

The six to twelve month time lag, it should be noted, included only those requests which came up unexpectedly during the academic year. All requests initiated before the academic year began were programmed in advance and competently handled. The system had no rapid response capability for unanticipated developments because the locally based supervisors had no authority to intervene even in the more routine situations.

A second consequence of concentrating decision-making authority at the top of the hierarchy was system rigidity. Because a few men at the top were required to decide upon such diverse matters as academic program content, school construction, personnel, teaching technique, equipment, and budget management, there was a tendency to develop one standardized way of accomplishing each task. The standardized approach simplified the administrative problem at the top, but was not adjusted to the socio-economic variance between regions nor to individual student variance (i.e., attitude, aptitude, occupational expectations, etc.)

The rigidity derived from standardized practices also slowed the adoption of new developments in technique and content. The same primary school curriculum, for example, was used from 1944 to 1969. For twenty-five years, every student in Venezuela was subjected to the same unchanging body of knowledge which was developed before 1945.[14]

A third consequence is referred to as "psychological distance" and is demonstrated in a study conducted by Gross, et.al. In a questionnaire issued to teachers and school directors of a large industrial city in Venezuela, Gross found the following:

(1) that approximately 75 percent of both the teachers and directors believe that 'lack of any real understanding of a teacher's problems by the Ministry of Education' constitutes a serious or very serious obstacle that blocks a more effective performance of teachers;

(2) that 63 percent of the teachers and 78 percent of the directors view the Ministry's lack of concern about the problems of their school as a serious or very serious obstacle;

(3) that 48 percent of the teachers and 50 percent of the directors feel the Ministry constitutes an obstacle to improvement in the teachers' performance because it makes too many important educational decisions; and

(4) that 45 percent of the teachers and 61 percent of the directors view the bureaucratic inefficiency of the Ministry as a serious handicap to the teachers' conduct.

These findings show that the majority of the directors and approximately one-half of the teachers do not hold a positive image of the Ministry of Education and that they have strong reservations about its understanding or concern with the educational problems of their schools.[15]

In short, the elaborate mechanism designed to control decisions from the capital city often tended to overlook the fact that real human beings with individual needs and anxieties were trying to induce decisions which related to specific situations. Where the Ministry saw the problems in terms of national statistics, the national school directors saw the problems in terms of angry parents, frustrated teachers, and a distorted learning process for students. Because of the extensive "psychological distance" between the teachers and the decision makers, the local school officials frequently exercised their option to do nothing which would require a great amount of time or create personal anxiety. The consequences of this practice were often dysfunctional for the educational process as a whole.

Conclusions

The Venezuelan national educational system was made up of subsystems (regions and districts) which reported to a parent system (Ministry of Education). Decision-making was concentrated at the Ministry level for all but the most routine decisions. Because the subsystems were so dependent on the Ministry, their relationships can be characterized as having exhibited low functional autonomy and high system interdependence.

Consequently, at least three major dysfunctions can be attributed to this inter-system relationship: 1) a decisional time lag on unanticipated requests, 2) an organizational rigidity that could not be adjusted to regional as well as individual differences, 3) a "psychological distance" between Ministry officials and local school officials which had negative implications for motivation and morale.

Pre-reform Organization of Education in Colombia

As in Venezuela, the Colombian Constitution established a federal system of government, and the educational organization parallels this form with national, state, and municipal school systems. Unlike Venezuela, the large majority of schools in Colombia are state and private schools. There are few national schools, and this characteristic makes the organizational and administrative problems very different from those of Venezuela.

Organizational Hierarchy and Authority Structure

As in Venezuela, the President of Colombia is popularly elected and he, in turn, appoints the Minister of Education. As indicated in Figure 2, the Minister of Education sets educational policy for all the school systems in the country; however, the Ministry executes policy only for the few national schools it controls directly. State governments and individual, private school directors are responsible for implementing most of the educational decisions made in the country.

As a governing body, each state has a popularly elected assembly; the governor, however, is appointed by the President of the country. The governor of each state appoints a secretary of education who is the state's chief educational officer. The secretary of education is responsible to the governor and the state assembly, and not to the Ministry of Education. This structural feature was at the crux of the pre-reform decisional problems in Colombia.

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Figure 2
Colombia -- Pre-Reform
Lines of Administrative Control

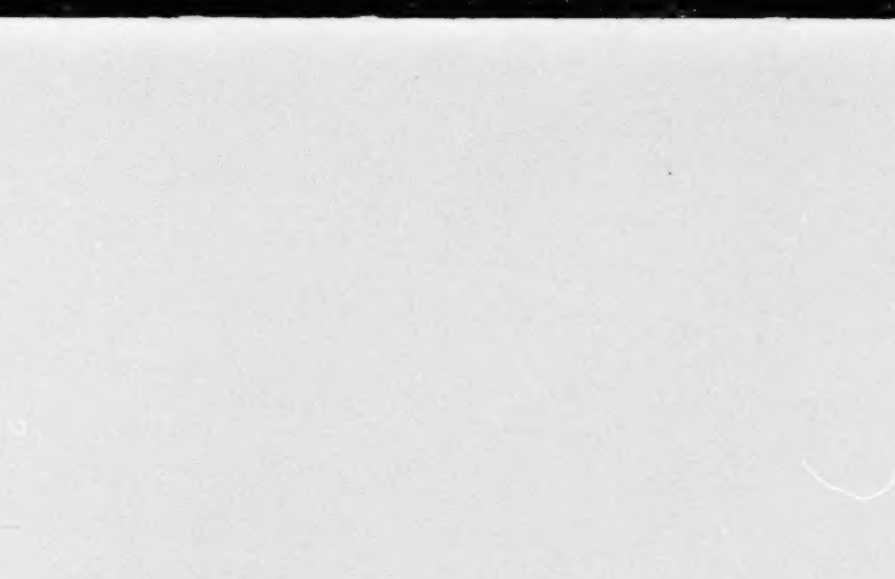


Table 2

Colombian Student Enrollment[17]

	Primary	Secondary
national schools	less than one percent	6.5 percent*
state and municipal schools	80.1 percent	40.0 percent
private schools	19.9 percent	53.5 percent
	100.0 percent	100.0 percent

*estimate

Decisional Points and Related Consequences

Because of a national and state separation of powers, the pre-reform educational system in Colombia maintained a relatively decentralized, formal authority structure. The Ministry of Education dictated policy, and the individual state and private schools executed policy. Action-oriented decisions (as distinguished from policy decisions) were made at the state level, and the Ministry had limited legal authority (and little available manpower) to intervene.

Every year, each state government appropriated money for state public expenditures--including education. Decisions concerning budget construction and management of public expenditures were, therefore, made at the state level.

However, over the years the national government played an increasing role in the financing of state education by augmenting state public expen-

diture budgets.[18] The national government earmarked money for public construction, housing, sanitation, education, and transportation. The nation, however, lost control of the money once it entered into the accounts of a state. Most of the national money was allocated for teachers' salaries.

According to informants highly placed in the Ministry of Education, state government officials regularly followed the practice of shifting funds from one budget item to another. Consequently, money earmarked for education was often used for building highways or purchasing health equipment rather than paying teachers' salaries.

Accordingly, the state educational systems have traditionally had difficulty meeting monthly payrolls. Often, teachers were not paid for as many as five or six months. Teacher strikes in primary and secondary schools were commonplace. At the end of each school year, only two or three of the twenty-three states were able to meet their salary obligations completely and close their financial books. In short, the state governments regularly abused their decision-making authority by not adhering to official administrative policy as established by the Ministry of Education.

Personnel decisions were also largely in the hands of the state secretaries of education and the private school directors. Even though the Ministry of Education had established a policy governing personnel matters, the states and private schools decided on all significant matters, for example: hiring, firing, promotions, transfer, and salary schedules. Consequently, individual state governments frequently made decisions which were not consistent with the official personnel policy established by the Ministry.

The Ministry of Education, for example, officially established minimum requirements for hiring primary and secondary school teachers. Primary school teachers must be normal or secondary school graduates. When hired, they must be placed in a level of a four level pay scale commensurate with their education and experience. The states, however, maintained an extra-legal fifth pay level for new teachers who did not meet the Ministry's minimum hiring requirements.[19] In 1966, approximately 40 percent of the primary school teachers employed in the schools did not meet the Ministry's minimum hiring standards.[20] The hiring of non-qualified teachers cannot be attributed to the fact that trained teachers were not available. In 1965, for example, 5000 students graduated from normal schools. Of this number, only 1,600 entered the teaching profession.[21] In addition, teachers often were hired when no money was budgeted for their salaries.

In interviews, the writer received four explanations as to why states frequently hired teachers who did not meet the Ministry's minimum standards. The first response offered economic reasons: the state budgets did not provide enough money to hire the quantity of teachers required at the higher salary levels approved by the Ministry, and the states were therefore forced to hire unqualified teachers at an unofficial salary scale far below the approved scale. The second response gave political reasons: the state educational system was used as part of the local political patronage mechansim, and teaching posts were frequently given to the party faithful. The third response concerned personal comfort: qualified teachers did not want to teach in rural areas. The fourth response was a variation of the first two: unqualified individuals could be hired to teach at a below-scale rate

(category 5), and the states did not allocate enough money in their educational budgets to hire teachers who met the minimum qualifications established by the Ministry. The Ministry of Education concl d that the fourth response was closest to the truth.

Conclusions

By national law, educational policy was to be established by the Ministry of Education, and the state and private schools were to execute decisions in accordance with that policy. Because the individual state secretaries of education were not legally responsible to the Ministry of Education, the states were able to exercise their wills over their own school systems. The Ministry had little authority to intervene even in cases where the states abused decision-making authority by acting outside Ministry policy.

The state and private school subsystem, therefore, can be characterized as exhibiting high functional autonomy and low system interdependence. In Venezuela, it will be remembered, the relationship was exactly the opposite.

Venezuelan Reform Movement

The crux of the decision problems in Venezuela centered around the concentration of authority at the highest levels of the organizational hierarchy. Ministry officials tended to make policy, procedural, and executive, as well as many routine administrative decisions for every subsystem in the national educational organization. Low-level supervisors did little more than serve as a communication link between the schools and the Ministry. As a result, the system was characterized by rigidity, a significant decisional time lag, and a dysfunctional psychological distance between school teachers and directors, and the decision-makers.

National Administrative Reform

The national government in Venezuela is divided into Ministries such as Health, Public Works, Transportation, Treasury, and Education. Each of these Ministries has historically concentrated decision-making authority at the top of its own organizational hierarchy. Interdependence existed among these Ministries because a major decision taken by any one of them usually required the collaboration of other Ministries. For example, a decision to construct new highways made by the Ministry of Public Works necessarily required the approval and cooperation of the Ministry of the Treasury. Because of the mutual interdependence among Ministries, there was little opportunity for any one Ministry to delegate a significant amount of decision-making authority to regional levels. If any one Ministry did delegate authority to a regional level, that regional office would encounter overwhelming problems in trying to solicit the cooperation of other Ministries

which maintained authority at the national level. Therefore, the President of Venezuela issued a decree designed to initiate a process of decentralization that encompassed the entire governmental administrative structure. The objective of the decree was to provide necessary administrative support to programs of regional development.[22]

The nation was divided into eight regions, each of which exhibited common socio-economic characteristics. Under the reform, all of the Ministries have been directed to establish offices in the eight regions, and regional activities are to be coordinated by a Regional Planning and Coordinating Office. The Regional Planning and Coordinating Office is responsible to the National Planning and Coordinating Office which reports to the President. In short, a coordinated infrastructure has been created at the regional level which has been delegated the authority to plan and execute specific programs of development. Thus, any one regional office can draw support from the regional offices of other Ministries of the government without having to depend on decisions from the capital city. A regional budgeting system has been created which enables the planning, coordination, and execution of programs from the regional level.

National Educational Reform

Consistent with the President's plan for general administrative decentralization (delegation of decision-making authority), the Minister of Education issued a decree progressively establishing offices in the eight administrative regions.[23] Among other things, the decree states that the regional offices will: 1) work in conjunction with the Regional Office of Planning and Coordination; 2) act as a mechanism of decision-making (execution), advising, and coordinating in all aspects of pedagogy and administration surrounding programs of educational supervision; 3) coordinate plans of action with high levels of the Ministry of Education; and 4) exercise functions of control and evaluation of student, teacher, and administrator performance within the region. In short, the above-mentioned points have redefined the structure, roles (authority and responsibility), and processes of the educational subsystems.

Structural Changes in the Hierarchy

As indicated in Figure 1, the pre-reform system maintained three separate branches (primary, secondary academic, and secondary vocational) at the national, regional, and in the case of primary education, district levels. Little contact and almost no coordinated decision-making existed between the branches at the sub-ministry level.

Under the reform, each of the eight regions has been subdivided into zones and districts (see Figure 3).[24] One supervisor is located at each level, and he has been given authority over all three educational branches. This structural change should have the effect of coordinating

decision-making behavior within and between levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Decentralization of Authority

Through the delegation of authority, the decisional points have changed within the organizational structure. In the area of administration, the eight regional supervisors have the decision-making authority to construct and administer their budget (to be approved and coordinated by the Ministry), hire and fire teachers, sanction personnel (faculty and students), maintain faculty and student records, and purchase equipment.

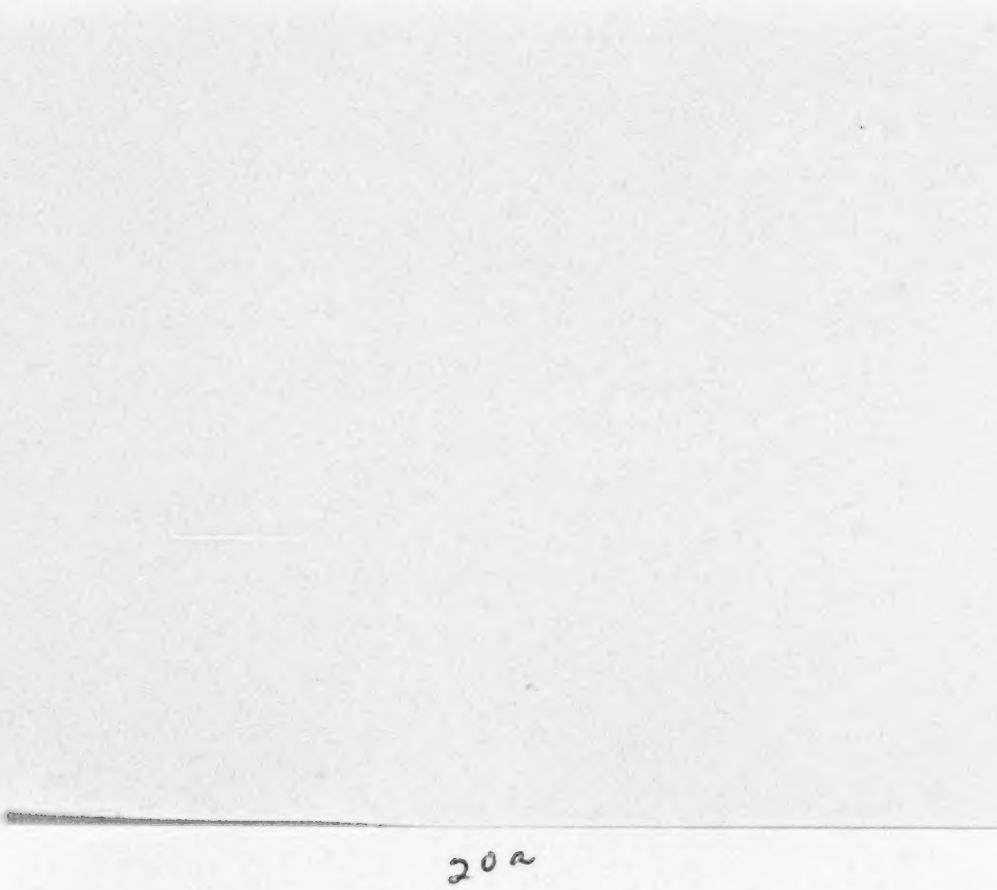
In academic areas, the regional supervisors have the authority to "regionalize" the curriculum, execute audio-visual aid and guidance programs, and evaluate student progress. Also, they have general supervisory control over the execution of academic programs in primary, rural, adult, and middle school education.[25]

Apparently, the zone and district levels have not been delegated any significant decision-making authority. Zone and district supervisors will continue to function as communication links between the schools and the regional offices.

Conclusions

By way of the reform movement, the Ministry of Education is divesting itself of the authority to make program execution and routine administrative decisions while retaining the authority to make policy and procedural decisions. A situation has been created which will permit increased functional autonomy and decreased interdependence between the parent system

Figure 3
Venezuela --- Post-Reform
Lines of Administrative Control



and its subsystems. If the reform movement is effective over time, it will, among other things, reduce the decisional time lag, increase the flexibility of the academic and administrative processes, and reduce the psychological distance between teachers, school directors, and supervising decision-makers.

Colombian Reform Movement

The crux of the decisional problem in the Colombian educational organization was the peculiar structural-functional relationship between the Ministry of Education and the individual state governments. The Ministry was charged with setting education policy for all educational systems; however, the state government and the private schools were expected to execute that policy. State governments often exercised wide latitude in their educational decisions, and significant differences developed between Ministry policy and state practice. The Ministry, in the meantime, was relatively powerless to do anything about abuses of authority at the state level.

National Reform in Education

In December of 1968, the President of Colombia signed a decree which initiated an educational reform movement designed to solve many of the nation's major educational problems.[26] Programs were passed into legislation involving, for example, school construction, curriculum development, athletics, social and natural sciences, cultural development, language development, university-level research, and the creation of nineteen comprehensive high schools.

In order to implement these new programs, the Colombian government created nine semi-autonomous educational institutes charged with achieving distinct program goals.[27] All of these institutes have been delegated well-defined policy-making and policy-execution authority to carry out

their missions. These institutes, however, will not be analyzed in this paper because they are being undertaken outside the traditional framework of the Ministry of Education. In other words, new structures have been created for the new missions, and the leaders are not responsible directly to the Minister of Education.

One major program was created within the traditional framework of the Ministry of Education, and this program attempts to improve the decisional problems identified in the pre-reform organization. It is called the Fondos Educacionales Regional (F.E.R.) or Regional Educational Funds.

F.E.R. Program

The problem facing the Minister of Education was to create a plan which would lead the states to execute decisions along the policy lines defined by the Ministry. This task had to be done in such a way as to violate neither constitutional "states rights" nor create a political fight. In short, states would have to agree to give up, or at least restrain, their authority voluntarily. The Regional Educational Funds (F.E.R.) program was created to resolve this problem.

A reorganization of the Ministry again brought forth a clear definition of its formal decisional role: "The Ministry will have the role of formulating educational policy, coordinating its execution at the national level, supervising the operation of other organizations in the educational sector (state, municipal and private), and serving as financing coordinator."[28] The preceeding quotation represents simply a restating of the historic mission of the Ministry. In the writer's opinion, the F.E.R. program is a mechanism which puts enforcement "teeth" into this historic role.

Context of the F.E.R. Program

The key to the F.E.R. program is the national money which year after year has been sent to the individual states to help finance state education. The Ministry's annual report says, "At the end of 1968 the Ministry sent a package of ordinances to the state governors which was to be submitted to the state assemblies for their consideration. The ordinances would authorize the state governors to sign a contract with the national government establishing the characteristics of the national (financial) assistance and authorizing the secretaries of education to initiate the reform."[29]

In order to make the F.E.R. contract as attractive as possible to the states, it was presented in a seductive form, for example: 1) the states would not be required to subscribe to the program; 2) it was billed as a decentralization project, giving the states greater control over their systems; 3) the nation would invest more money in state education; 4) advisors would be provided by the nation to assist state secretaries of education in their duties; 5) audio-visual equipment would be donated to the state educational systems; and 6) the national schools in each state would be placed under the administrative control of the corresponding state government. Underlying the offer, however, was the implication that if any state did not sign the contract, it would not receive any more national money to support state education. All 23 states (and the Federal District) eventually signed contracts.

F.E.R. Contracts

In signing the contracts with the Ministry, the states agreed to adhere to many constraining clauses. Because the content of these clauses

greatly limited the decision-making latitude previously enjoyed by the states, the states had, in fact, voluntarily surrendered much of their authority.

Among other things, the contracts require each state to:

1. increase annually state appropriations for education consistent with the growth of the total state budget,
2. hire only teachers who meet the qualification standards established by the Ministry,
3. replace all non-qualified teachers (primary and secondary) within a period of two years (eliminate the illegal category 5),
4. create positions for supervisors at the ratio of 1 for every 200 teachers,
5. reorganize the state offices of education to agree with recommendations of the Ministry,
6. manage the wage-scale and personnel promotions consistent with Ministry policy and national law,
7. permit the Ministry to supervise the state budgetary expenditures in education,
8. demonstrate the availability of funds before hiring additional teachers,
9. accept the presence of a Ministry official (a delegado) who is authorized to supervise all matters mentioned in the contract as well as investigate irregularities found in other segments of the state educational system.

Each state (and the Federal District) has its own F.E.R. fund. The national and state contributions to the fund must be placed in a bank account which is managed apart from the regular state budget. Expenditures for non-budgeted items cannot be drawn from the account without the approval of the Ministry's delegado. According to the contracts, if for any reason the state cannot meet its obligatory monthly contribution to the F.E.R.

account or mismanages funds in that account, the national contribution to the fund must be returned immediately.[30]

Conclusion

Early it was pointed out that the Colombian government recently adopted a new set of national educational goals. In order to achieve these objectives, the Ministry of Education had to find a means of controlling and streaming state administrative processes. The F.E.R. program became the mechanism through which the Ministry is striving for maximum state contributions to the national educational goals.

By agreeing to the conditions of the F.E.R. contract, states have voluntarily accepted constraints on their decision-making authority. The Ministry of Education now has a tool to force the states to comply with official policy. At the end of the first year of the F.E.R. program, 20 of the 23 states had met their financial obligations on time. This was very different from previous years where only 3 or 4 of the 23 states annually had done so.

In short, under the F.E.R. program there exists a higher degree of interdependence and a lower degree of functional autonomy between the parent system and the subsystems.

A Comparison of the Venezuelan and Colombian Reforms

The educational organizations of both nations are similar in the sense that their respective Constitutions provide for the existence of national, state, and municipal systems of education. The difference lies, however, in the percentage of students enrolled in the subsystems. As a consequence of unbalanced enrollment patterns, education in Venezuela tends to be national education, whereas in Colombia it tends to be state and private school education. The decision-making processes in the two nations, therefore, are quite dissimilar.

In both countries, the Ministries of Education are charged with making policy decisions which govern the pedagogical and administrative components of the educational processes. In Venezuela, the Ministry not only created the policy but executed it as well. In Colombia, however, the Ministry created the policy, but individual states (and private schools) executed it. A major distinction between the two systems, then, was the hierarchical level at which major "action" decisions were made.

In Venezuela, the Ministry tended to make policy, procedural, executive and, in many cases, routine administrative decisions. This concentration of decision-making authority had the dysfunctional effects of creating, among other things, a decisional time lag, a rigidity toward change, and a psychological distance between the Ministry and the local schools. In an attempt to reduce these and other decisional problems, the Ministry has delegated decision-making authority to regional levels. An effort is being made to reduce the controls on the decision-making behavior of regional officials.

Colombia, on the other hand, is attempting to place narrower limits on the decision-making behavior of regional (state) officials. An effort is being made to force state officials to make decisions which are consistent with official Ministry policy. The rationale is that a strict adherence to official pedagogical and administrative policy is the most effective means of systematizing behavior (teacher and administrator) according to patterns which are thought to be necessary if the nation is to achieve its educational goals.

Both nations are trying to arrive at organizational and administrative formulas which best support their educational goals. The hypotheses implicit in the two reforms are quite dissimilar. Starting from a pre-reform base, Venezuela is hypothesizing that a higher functional autonomy and a lower system interdependence between the parent system and subsystems will result in reduced uniformity and greater adaptability to local needs. Colombia, on the other hand, hypothesizes that lower functional autonomy and higher interdependence between the parent system and the subsystems will lead to greater uniformity in behavioral processes resulting in a more systematized approach to achieving established educational goals.

After the educational reforms of the two nations have been fully institutionalized, certain structural and functional similarities will be evident. The Ministries of Education will make pedagogical and administrative policies; however, these policies will be executed at lower hierarchical levels. In addition, the Ministries will supervise the execution of policies and, if deemed necessary, veto lower level decisions.

Constraints to Educational Reform

Change does not come easily. Behavioral patterns maintained and reinforced by traditional decision-making processes always present formidable barriers to reform. The Venezuelan and Colombian attempts will not be exceptions to the rule. To this point in the paper an attempt has been made to demonstrate how the reforms are supposed to resolve decision-making problems inherent in the pre-reform systems. The analysis will be more complete, however, if some thought is given to the constraints which might impede the smooth and efficient operation of the educational reforms.

The constraints to be discussed here represent, by and large, the writer's perceptions of certain traditional behavioral patterns in Colombia and Venezuela. It should be recognized that the writer's personal value system colors these perceptions. The following potential constraints to the reforms will be dealt with: (1) political power, (2) career management, and (3) fiscal management.

Political Power

In Venezuela (at the National level) and in Colombia (at the state level) educational organizations were often treated as extensions of political institutions. Specific educational decisions were often made for good political reasons.

In Colombia, for example, decisions were often made at the state level to use educational funds for public projects which had greater visibility (plus political returns) than educational projects. Also,

Ministry officials were suspicious (and at the same time powerless to act) when large numbers of teachers were hired by state governments immediately prior to elections. When this situation occurred, there was reasonable assurance that the new "teachers" would be on the streets organizing voters rather than in the classrooms organizing children.

In Venezuela, the hiring and promotion decisions favored individuals of the same political persuasion as the party in power. In every community, no matter how tiny, there is at least one teacher; and he might be the only public official in the area. In poor areas the teacher stands out as a learned individual who commands respect, and his presence at the grassroots level can contribute to the political party's power base.

As reported earlier, decision-making authority was centralized and concentrated at the Ministry level in Venezuela and at the state level in Colombia. The reform movements will alter the traditional focus of decision-making authority in both countries. The change will affect the educational as well as the political institutions and thereby creating a potential danger to the reforms. If the political parties feel their power is threatened seriously by the loss of control of the educational organization as a power base, a sustained drive might be made to reestablish the pre-reform decision-making patterns.

Career Management

A second constraint which might impede the change process can be characterized as career management decision-making. Skilled and knowledgable educators are scarce in Venezuela and Colombia. Because authority and responsibility are being delegated to regional levels in Venezuela and the Colombian Ministry policy requires the creation of new supervisory

positions at the local level, individuals with a higher level of training and experience will be required to move to outlying geographical areas (away from Caracas in Venezuela and the state capital cities in Colombia).

However, living and working in the capital city have always been thought of as status rewards for public officials. Also, the personal and family comforts afforded by the capital city are rarely duplicated in outlying areas. In both countries qualified individuals may resist (if not reject) any career management decision to move them into regional or local positions outside the capital cities.

The reform movements will be seriously threatened if some form of reward system is not created to overcome the reluctance of competent educational officials to leave the capital cities. The writer is unaware of any such reward system being built into the reforms.

Fiscal Management

Under the Venezuelan reform, budget management will be practiced for the first time at the regional level. Controlling the allocation of human and material resources from the regional level will signal a dramatic downward shift of executive authority from the Ministry level. The loss of control over expenditures by officials at the Ministry level may be viewed by some as a loss of personal power. As a result, a tendency to support officially but resist unofficially (perhaps unconsciously) might foster a behavioral pattern which impedes the process of change.

A danger to the Colombian reform will exist if the Ministry loses its resolve to enforce strictly the budgetary constraints placed on the states by the FER contracts. If the states violate the conditions of the

contract and are not penalized, the FER program will be reduced quickly to a meaningless piece of paper. The act of penalizing the states for violation of the FER contract will probably be interpreted by the states as a political decision rather than an educational one. If this proves to be the case, the Ministry will be hesitant to enforce the terms of the contract out of fear that the political repercussions will have a damaging effect on the ongoing activities of the Ministry.

A second dimension of the budget management problem will be fiscal accountability. In Colombia, the state educational officials will be required to confine their financial decisions to conform with Ministry policy. In Venezuela, financial decisions will be made at regional levels for the first time.

The problem of fiscal accountability is magnified when financial decision-making authority exists at the middle levels in the hierarchy. More individuals, for example, are participating in the decision-making process. Also, no one office maintains all the information necessary to clearly identify: (1) how priorities have been established, (2) whether or not the priorities maximize pedagogical returns, and (3) whether or not fiscal decisions are made to adhere to the established priorities.

As middle level officials go through the learning process required for these new responsibilities, a certain degree of inefficiency and waste will be generated. If this inefficiency and waste is brought to the public eye, pressures will be brought to bear which call for a return to the pre-reform decision-making patterns.

In short, the planning of a reform and the execution of that reform are two distinct problems. As the architects of change design their

strategies, they cannot possibly comprehend all of the converging forces which will seek to retard, if not eliminate, their meticulously constructed programs.

At this writing the educational reforms are still in the balance. Only time will tell whether or not the commitments to success are strong enough to counteract the constraints that surround the new programs.

Footnotes

1. Unfortunately, at this writing the reforms in both countries are so recent that, as yet, it is not possible to obtain post-reform measures of change.

2. Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Social Structure and Organizations," in James G. March (ed.), Handbook of Organizations. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company. 1965. p. 142.

3. Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, Toward a General Theory of Action. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

4. Herbert Simon, Administrative Behavior. New York: Macmillan, 1957.

5. Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations. London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, p. 337.

6. Alvin W. Gouldner, "Organizational Analysis," in Robert Merton, Leonard Broom, Leonard Cottrell Jr. (eds.), Sociology Today. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1959, p. 419.

7. Ministerio de Educacion, Más y Mejor Educación, Division Tecnica, 1969, pp. 15 and 38.

8. Ibid.

9. At this writing, the educational reform had been implemented partially. In order to avoid confusion, the past tense is used to describe the pre-reform system.

10. Venezuela, Constitution. Art. 136.

11. Venezuela, Ley de Educación, Arts. 7, 79, 90 7 93. Reglamento General de la Ley de Educación, (20 de octubre de 1956), Arts. 1, 2, 61, y 66.

12. Centro de Investigaciones Administrativas y Sociales, Decentralización y Desconcentración Administrativa en el Sector de la Educación Primaria, Escuela de Administración Pública, Caracas, diciembre, 1967, pp. 56-57.

13. La Gaceta Oficial No. 899.

14. Ministerio de Educación, Programas de Educación Primaria, 7 de diciembre, 1944.

15. Neal Gross, Noel McGinn, David Napior, Walter Jewell III, Planning for Educational Change: An Application of Sociological and Psychological Perspectives. Unpublished manuscript, Center for Studies in Education and Development, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 5, 1968, Ch. 5, p. 6.

16. Octavio Arizmendi Posada, La Transformación Educativa Nacional. Bogotá, Colombia, 1969.

17. Ibid.

18. Ley 97, Art. 9 de 1945.

19. Ley 111 de 1960.

20. Jorge Octavio Díaz Velásquez. "Programa de Capacitación del Magisterio," Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Colombia, 1969, p. 14.

21. Daniel Arango, Informe del Ministerio de Educación, al Congreso Nacional, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Bogotá, julio de 1966, p. 39.

22. Decreto No. 72, 11 de junio de 1969.

23. Ministerio de Educación, Dirección Técnica, Número 10,279, Caracas, Venezuela, 1 de septiembre de 1969.

24. EDUPLAN, Plan General de Reorganización del Actual Sistema de Supervision, Comision de Supervisión, Documento no. 15, Caracas, julio de 1968.

25. EDUPLAN, "Anteproyecto de Reglamento del Sistema Integrado de Supervisión Educativo," Comisión de Supervisión, Documento no. 18, Caracas, abril de 1969.

26. Carlos Lleras Restrepo, Decreto no. 3157, 26 de diciembre de 1968.

27. A description of objectives, responsibilities, and authority of the new institutes can be found in Octavio Arizmendi Posada, op. cit.

28. Ministerio de Educación, "La Reforma de la Organización Educativa," Serie: Transformacion Educativa no. 3, 1969, p. 7.

29. Octavio Arizmendi Posada, op. cit. p. 19.

30. Contrato No. 1, Celebrado Entre el Gobierno Nacional y el Departamento de . . . .